



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Keeping Swimmer's Ear at bay this summer

By: Tess Cox, Pediatric Hospitalist, Evans Army Community Hospital

Summer is on its way and soon our children will be playing and splashing and enjoying neighborhood or backyard pools. Along with increased pool time comes the possibility of developing an infection in the outer ear canal. It's officially called Otitis Externa, more commonly referred to as "Swimmer's Ear".

First, it's important to note that this type of outer ear infection does not result just from swimming. Other causes include bacteria and fungus, allergies, irritants, and scratches or trauma.

What are some symptoms of outer ear infections? Most commonly, you will find:

- Pain inside the ear, especially when the ear is pulled or tugged
- Itching inside the ear
- Fluid or pus leaking from the ear
- Difficulty hearing well

Through special skin cells and ear wax, the ear canal normally has a "self-cleaning" protective quality. These help to prevent bacteria and fungi from growing inside the ear. Using Q-Tips or other objects inside the ear canal can scratch that special skin or remove too much wax and the protection is lost. It's important to keep anything like that out of the ear.

Prolonged exposure to water or devices that block the ear canals, like hearing aids, headphones or ear plugs, can increase the risk of developing Otitis Externa.

Your primary care medical provider can look inside your child's ear with a special light and tell if your child has an outer ear infection. During the exam, your provider may clean out the ear to improve his or her ability to see the eardrum. Cleaning some infection out of the ear canal may also help speed healing.

When it is diagnosed, treatment aims to reduce pain and eliminate the infection through the use of antibiotic ear drops and/or ear pain drops (always use as directed for 5-7 days). Keep the ear dry for a week and do not plug it with cotton all the time. After the ear drops have had a chance to work for 15-20 minutes, remove the cotton and allow the ear to dry out. Patients can use over-the-counter pain medications such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen as directed to help with pain or fever.



Also, patients should avoid wearing hearing aids, headphones, ear buds, etc. and clean these items well with alcohol. Allow them to air dry for a few days before trying to use them again. Using contaminated items could bring the infection back!

Treating Swimmer's Ear (Otitis Externa) is an easy process. If your child's ears do not significantly improve after using the treatments for a week, return to your medical provider for a re-evaluation.

To learn more about Otitis Externa, check out the following sites:

<http://www.healthscout.com/ency/1/524/main.html>

http://www.medicinenet.com/otitis_externa/article.htm